

## Formation of a new, local Multi Academy Trust (MAT) – Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the driver to form a multi-academy trust?

The government has made it clear that it sees a trust-led system as the future of the education system in England. Against this backdrop, we have engaged in thorough and careful discussions with valued local partners to establish a trust that serves the students, families and wider communities of the Fylde and Wyre. All of the partners in this venture are strong and bring a track record of successful education and improvement to the table. As such, we aim to create an organisation that is greater than the sum of its individual parts to make secondary and post-16 education in this area a beacon of excellence.

### What are the benefits of joining the trust for the staff, students and wider community of Blackpool Sixth?

You will see that many of the questions are designed to tackle the most commonly asked questions, often fuelled by negative opinions on the Academy system. However, we are focused on the sustained future of Blackpool Sixth and ensuring that we can continue to provide the best quality education, the highest standards and the strongest support and guidance for our students. The creation of this MAT still allows this to happen. We will retain our identity, our history, our vision and our ethos. We will work with similar, highly respected and hugely successful partners to create an even stronger educational experience for the young people of Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre. We will ensure that any freedoms offered as a result of becoming an Academy are considered in how they benefit our students, our staff and the wider community. It is a really exciting chapter in the growth, development and sustainability of Blackpool Sixth.

### What are the specific benefits to the students of Blackpool Sixth of joining this MAT?

Our vision is always to ensure that every young person succeeds and we will ensure this happens across every school and the college. Given that the quality of the providers we plan to partner with are strong in their own right, we see the following as benefits to the students at Blackpool Sixth:

- **Teaching and learning collaboration** – this will mean that our students can continue to benefit from having the highest quality teaching and learning in college whilst also gaining from best practice from our partner schools; students will also benefit from sharing our best practice across the trust. This good practice could take the form of classroom delivery, pedagogical research, assessment structures, behaviour for learning, technology for learning, assistive technology, SEND and alternative provision support.
- **Curriculum collaboration** – we know that having (and delivering) a highly effective and impactful curriculum is key to student success that allows them to access the next stage of their education or employment. A formal partnership with the other schools in the MAT will enable us to collaborate on our curriculum offer and delivery by sharing high level knowledge, skills and experience with each other to benefit the students; this will be powerful in driving continuous improvement.
- **Professional development** – having staff skilled to do the best job has always been our mission as we know this provides an effective education for our students. Collaboration in a multi-academy trust will allow staff development activities to be undertaken at scale across the trust, where appropriate, and will provide future development opportunities such as secondments, promotions, etc. Furthermore, working within a multi-academy trust will provide a forum for staff to share best practice whether that be in the classroom or in other areas of our work which in turn will enhance the student experience.
- **Economies of scale** – bringing together some central services such as HR, finance, estates, payroll, IT and procurement can generate some economies of scale over time through natural wastage; the savings made can then be used to fund teaching and learning improvements in the schools.

Other benefits include:

- Enhanced transition support between school and college
- Greater continuity of learning experience between school and college
- Access to a more extensive programme of enrichment
- Extended peer mentoring opportunities
- Access to a wider pool of staff expertise and specialisms
- Wider partnership, enhancing the knowledge and skills of young people and increasing social mobility
- Seamless progression for students within the Trust and beyond into Higher Education, apprenticeships and employment
- An even better resourced college.

### **What are the specific benefits to the staff of Blackpool Sixth to joining this MAT?**

Our vision has always been to be a great employer and this will not change if we academise and join a MAT. However, we envisage some additional benefits including:

- The opportunity to be a system leader and have increased oversight of/influence over curriculum and teaching in different phases of education locally
- New opportunities to share teaching and learning strategies and expertise across phases
- Increased investment in facilities and resources
- A larger and more diverse peer support network including involvement in cross-trust groups
- Strengthened leadership and governance to support all colleagues
- Progression and career development opportunities across the Trust
- An employer that is better placed to adapt to external changes and take opportunities as they arise
- An employer with greater influence in the locality and beyond
- New opportunities to develop skills and expertise within the Trust
- Additional financial stability and sustainability.

### **Will the college name change?**

No, we will still be known and proudly operate as The Blackpool Sixth Form College. In the future, the college might at times refer to their membership of the MAT.

### **What will the MAT be called?**

The MAT will be called The Coastal Collaborative Trust in recognition of our locality and our ethos of collaboration.

### **Will staff contracts change?**

No, all staff will transfer to the academy trust on their existing terms and conditions that are protected under TUPE law. It is not intended to change these once the transfer is complete. However, the MAT will allow for the potential of newly appointed roles across the Trust to ensure quality, professional development and opportunity.

### **Would staff be expected to work in other schools?**

No, staff are employed under their existing terms and conditions to work at the college. There may be opportunities for staff to work in another school or across the MAT, however these would be advertised and staff would willingly apply for, and accept, these roles. Again, the opportunity to develop roles across the Trust in the future is exciting and ensures the young people get access to the very best people.

### **As a partner of the Trust, will the college have increased purchasing power?**

Yes, it's probably the case that the Trust will be able to obtain better value when negotiating contracts for services such as insurance, accountancy, HR, payroll, broadband and other internet and IT services. Again, opportunities to ensure best value for money will be sourced continually and being part of a MAT will allow us to explore these in a timely and sensitive manner.

### **Would our college's budget be used to bail out a new MAT member school if it was in financial trouble?**

No, and no decision will ever be taken that might jeopardise that. All schools within the MAT have their own budget and financial control. If another school joined the partnership, then they would only do so if their financial position was strong.

### **Will Blackpool Sixth still have a relationship with Blackpool and Lancashire Local Authorities?**

Yes, we are proud to be part of Blackpool and Lancashire LAs and we have a very strong relationship with them. We would expect that these relationships will continue as part of a MAT.

### **Will becoming a member of a MAT impact relationships with other schools and colleges?**

No, we will continue to work in partnership with all our partner schools, whether they are Local Authority or belong to another MAT. This has been the way in which Blackpool Sixth has worked for many years and this practice will not change. We will also continue to work closely with other colleges to share best practice; this has been and will continue to be a strength of the college. This exciting element of a MAT is the ability to continuously work in collaboration and harmony with excellent partners, all committed to the same aim.

### **Will the term dates change?**

The current arrangements for the setting of term dates will continue.

### **Will the college still have a Principal? What will the leadership structure of the trust look like?**

There will be very little that will change in the day to day running of the college. The Principal and the senior leadership team will continue to lead and drive forward improvements at the college. At Trust level, there will be an executive leadership team to lead the Trust on a day-to-day basis; this team will be made up of leaders of each of the founding organisations.

### **What will governance look like?**

The proposed structure of the MAT's governance follows a standard model recommended by the Department for Education. Whilst following this structure we will wish to delegate as much of the decision-making as is sensible and efficient to individual schools' governing bodies as and when they might join our MAT in the future. Trustees will oversee the MAT and ensure that leaders are carrying out their duties effectively. They would probably meet formally three times a year. The trustees have been selected to give each school/college an equal say in this process. The next level is a Local Governing Body (LGB) for each school and it will include parent representation. Most decisions will be made at this level to ensure that the LGBs can remain focused on the standards of education for children and young people.

### **Have the leaders and governors considered the possible disadvantages of a MAT, as seen or perceived in some other MATs, and how would they mitigate them?**

The key element when starting this process was to offer information that we felt would address some of the common myths and misconceptions around Academisation, many of which were formed in the early days of schools converting in challenging circumstances and being “forced” to join MATs. This is not the case with Blackpool Sixth and we are making a decision based on what we feel is in the best interest for the students now and in the future.

At inception of the MAT, all the founder institutions are strong – good results and Ofsted good or better. Therefore, it would make no sense to make alterations to how they are run. However, to secure that, the Scheme of Governance and Delegation, which is the document that sets out the terms of engagement between the schools, the college and the MAT, cements local autonomy into the Trust ethos and subsequent ways of working. The role of the local governing body in each of the institutions will be focused on ensuring high quality education and stakeholder engagement, just as it is now.

### **Have the leaders and governors considered the risks of not joining a MAT with other like-minded providers before coming to this decision?**

The Academies structure was started many years ago as a Labour initiative and accelerated dramatically under the Conservatives. The academisation of schools and sixth form colleges in England has gathered significant pace in recent years. School and sixth form colleges are encouraged to find like-minded establishments and look for ways to create strong partnerships. Whilst this is happening some freedoms afforded to sixth form colleges are being reduced. Therefore, the college is looking to safeguard its future, build strong and sustainable collaborative relationships with local schools and take advantage of extra funding that is open to Academies. It should be noted that all political parties are committed to Academies so a change in government would not impact our decision.

The advertised benefits of joining a MAT are multiplied by our ability to choose partners and control the process. The risk of not doing so could see changes to Blackpool Sixth beyond our control in the future. The proposed model will enjoy the benefits (flexibility to improve and develop quickly in terms of staffing, curriculum and environment, strong local accountability) that suit our needs. It is difficult to put a price on earned autonomy and choice. This is secured by joining a MAT.

### **Will the MAT just be another private company?**

No, MATs, whilst having a company name and number, also operate as a registered charity, thus complying with charity law in the UK, as well as under Education and Skills Funding (ESFA) regulations. Any budget surplus/reserves are specifically for the use of the schools and the MAT for the education of the children and young people in it.